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Influence of subject choice, work overload and work stress on expatriate higher education teachers

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Abstract: Subject choice, work overload and work stress influence personal and professional lives of higher education teachers. Though the majority of higher education teachers in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries are expatriates, yet research on expatriate higher education teachers working in the GCC countries is limited. This paper presents one part of the work life balance survey and focuses on the influence of subject choice, work overload and work stress on higher education teachers in the GCC countries.

1. Introduction

Though working beyond 48 hours a week is a prominent reason for disordered social life of employees (Fagan et al. 2006; Messenger, 2004; Johnson et al. 2001) yet organizational focus on 24x7 is promoting working longer hours as well as working at odd hours (Bailyn et al. 2001; Hogarth et al. 2001). College teachers are progressively getting burdened with work overload (Hall, 2003) resulting in reduced quality time for lecture preparation and multitasking induced work stress (Bubb and Earley, 2004). This stress gets multiplied when the teachers don't get to teach subjects of their choice and expertise (Naithani, 2011). Time for planning, preparations and assessment, work autonomy, application of skills and load of multitasking (especially administrative work), choice of subject are important work design related factors which significantly influence higher education teacher's (Naithani, 2011). Information on the global experience of college teachers is limited (Richardson and McKenna, 2003) especially in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries (Al-Lamki, 2006) as such there is a need for research on college teachers in the GCC countries. In view of above a survey was conducted in the three GCC countries (Bahrain, Oman and the UAE) to explore key work and personal life related factors which influence higher education teachers. This paper presents one part of the survey which focussed on the influence of subject choice, work overload and work stress on higher education teachers.

2. Defining the scope of research and research methodology

2.1. Research Aim

The research aim of the study is to describe and produce an analysis of the influence of subject choice, work

overload and work stress on expatriate higher education teachers working in the GCC countries and the role of demographic factors in the influence.

2.2. Research hypothesis and research questions

H₀: Individual demographic factors did not significantly influence the response from the respondents.

Above mentioned null hypothesis was tested for each question for the following factors: gender, age, years of the expatriate experience, marital status, family size, dual earner family, days worked, hours worked and lecture hours conducted. Following three questions were selected to conduct the survey:

Question 1. Do you mostly get to teach subjects of your expertise?

Question 2. Do you get quality time to plan in advance for your lectures?

Question 3. You do not suffer from multi-tasking related work stress?

The survey research approach was adopted to collect the required data for testing the hypothesis. Target population for this study was Indian expatriate higher education teachers working in Bahrain, Oman and UAE. As the target population was spread across three different countries, data were collected through self-administered web based questionnaire. Three pilot tests, including Cronbach's alpha test for internal reliability, were conducted before finalising the questionnaire. The scope of the study was confined to three GCC countries (Bahrain, Oman and UAE). The sample size was 271 (at a 5% margin of error and 90% confidence level) and the net response rate was 52 percent.

2.3. Sample size: Justification for margin of error and confidence level

For categorical data 5% and for continuous data 3% margin of error is acceptable in social science research (Lenth, 2001; Krejcie and Morgan, 1970) as such for the study value of margin of error was taken at 5%. Commonly used confidence levels in social science research are 99%, 95% and 90% (John, 2003; SSRIC, 2000); as such for the study values of confidence level was taken at 90%.

2.4. Selection of scaling technique: Likert Scale

Five points Likert scale was used as scaling technique. The primary reason to use a Likert Scale is that data are easy to code and report by assigning codes to the responses so that a higher score reflects a higher level of agreement. This is important because after entering the individual scores, calculation of an average score of the whole group for each survey question becomes easy. In the case of assigning higher values to stronger agreement, higher mean scores for each question will translate into levels of agreement for each item, and lower scores will reflect participants' disagreement (CIT, 2007). In this study, responses to all questions were taken on a five point Likert scale with strongly agree coded as 5, moderately agree coded as 4, neither agree nor disagree coded as 3, moderately disagree coded as 2 and strongly disagree coded as 1. Lower values in the responses and resultant relatively lower median and mode indicate poor work-life balance and higher values indicate relatively better work-life balance.

2.5. Accepted range of reliability test and test results

Internal consistency reliabilities vary from a low of 0 to a high of 1. Response range close to or above 0.70 is acceptable (George & Mallery, 2003; DeVellis, 1991). A pilot test of the research questions was conducted by collecting response from eight respondents and responses were tested for internal consistency. The range of

Cronbach's Alpha score of the responses was 0.82. In view of the test results the questionnaire was finalised for survey as the questionnaire had cleared the test.

2.6. Data tabulation and selection of statistical tools

The responses were not needed to be subjected to manual editing as the data file of the web questionnaire was directly imported into the statistical programme Minitab-15. Data collected through Likert scale are ordinal data and have inherent order or sequences (Mogey, 1999). Non-parametric statistical tools such as frequencies, median and mode (not a mean), inter-quartile range (not the standard deviation), tabulation, chi-squared statistics, Man-Whitney test (for two unrelated samples) and Kruskal-Wallis tests (for three or more unrelated samples) are best suited for the analysis of data of ordinal nature (Elene and Seaman, 2007).

For this study following non-parametric statistical tools have been used:

- Tabulation, frequencies and median
- Mann-Whitney test (for two unrelated samples)
- Kruskal-Wallis test (for three or more unrelated samples)

3. Findings and discussion

The following section presents detailed analysis of the responses to the questions asked related to the work design of respondents.

Q1. Do you mostly get to teach subjects of your expertise?

Respondent's gender, age, marital status and weekly lecture hours significantly influenced responses when respondents were asked if they get to teach subjects of their expertise. Hypothesis test results are presented in the following table (Table 1).

Table 1: Significant difference in responses to question one

| Factor | Significance | Hypothesis Test Result |
|------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Gender | $p = 0.002, p < 0.05$ | Reject H_0 in favour of H_1 |
| Age | $p = 0.010, p < 0.05$ | Reject H_0 in favour of H_1 |
| Expat experience | $p = 0.142, p > 0.05$ | Do not reject H_0 |
| Marital Status | $p = 0.006, p < 0.05$ | Reject H_0 in favour of H_1 |
| Working spouse | $p = 0.4991, p > 0.05$ | Do not reject H_0 |
| No of children | $p = 0.802, p > 0.05$ | Do not reject H_0 |
| Days worked | $p = 0.394, p > 0.05$ | Do not reject H_0 |
| Hours worked | $p = 0.177, p > 0.05$ | Do not reject H_0 |
| Lecture hours | $p = 0.001, p < 0.05$ | Reject H_0 in favour of H_1 |

Fifty four percent of the respondents either moderately (38 percent) or strongly (16 percent) disagreed (Table 2) when asked whether they get to teach subjects of their expertise. Response from male and female respondents had significant difference with p (2 tailed) = 0.002 ($p <$

0.05). Median for male responses was higher (median=3) in comparison to median for female responses (median=2), thus denoting higher overall disagreement of female respondents.

Table 2: Response frequency details for question one

| | S. Agree | M. Agree | Neutral | M. Disagree | S. Disagree | n | N* |
|--------|----------|----------|----------|-------------|-------------|-----|-----|
| Total | 10 (7%) | 33(24%) | 21 (15%) | 53 (38%) | 22 (16%) | 139 | 2 |
| Male | 8 (11%) | 21 (28%) | 16 (22%) | 23 (31%) | 6 (8%) | 74 | Nil |
| Female | 2 (3%) | 12 (18%) | 5 (8%) | 30 (46%) | 16 (25%) | 65 | 2 |

n: total number of responses; n*: no response

While 39 percent of the male respondents moderately (31 percent) or strongly (8 percent) disagreed, in contrast a very high percentage (71 percent) of the female respondents moderately (46 percent) or strongly (25 percent) disagreed. Female respondents reported their views more candidly with only 8 percent opting for the neutral option of 'neither agree nor disagree', whereas neutral response was comparatively higher at 22 percent for the male respondents. Only 3 percent of the female respondents strongly agreed in comparison to 11 percent male. The percentage of negative and positive responses from male respondents was equal at 39 percent. Senior respondents (45-54 years; 55 years and older) moderately agreed to getting subjects of expertise to teach (n=16, median=3; n=6, median=4), whereas younger respondents (25-44 years) moderately disagreed (n=116, median=2). Married respondents living with or without a spouse reported moderate disagreement (n= 129, median=2) and in contrast unmarried (all male) respondents reported strong agreement (n=8, median=4.5). A combined analysis of responses according to age groups and marital status brought out the following facts. Though married respondents moderately disagreed, yet a small group (n=22) of senior respondents (45 years and older) within the category of married respondents (n=129) moderately agreed to getting to teach subjects of expertise.

Though a significant difference was observed in responses based on number of lecture hours in a week ($p=0.001$, $p<0.05$) yet the agreement/disagreement levels did not seem to have any relationship with a higher or

lower number of lecture hours, and the response was mixed. Respondents conducting more than 21 lecture hours a week reported moderate disagreement (n=13, median=2), respondents conducting 18 to 21 lecture hours reported moderate agreement (n=33, median=4), respondents conducting 15 to 18 lecture hours reported moderate disagreement (n=41, median=2) and respondents conducting less than 15 lecture hours in a week reported a neutral view (n=44, median=3).

Following is the final status of demographic factors which significantly influenced responses to the question (Q 1) inquiring about availability of facility to teach subjects of expertise.

- The majority of the respondents disagreed with the statement that they get to teach subjects of their expertise.
- Disagreement was higher with female respondents.
- With decreasing age the degree of disagreement increased.
- Married respondents disagreed in a higher degree in comparison to unmarried respondents.

Q2. Do you get quality time to plan in advance for your lectures?

When asked for the availability of quality time to advance lecture planning (Q2), the responses were significantly influenced by gender, years of the expatriate experience, marital status, dual earner couples (working spouse), hours worked and lecture hours (Table 3).

Table 3: Significant difference in responses to question two.

| Factor | Significance | Hypothesis Test Result |
|------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Gender | $p = 0.001$, $p < 0.05$ | Reject H_o in favour of H_1 |
| Age | $p = 0.055$, $p > 0.05$ | <i>Do not reject H_o</i> |
| Expat experience | $p = 0.001$, $p < 0.05$ | Reject H_o in favour of H_1 |
| Marital Status | $p = 0.003$, $p < 0.05$ | Reject H_o in favour of H_1 |
| Working spouse | $p = 0.0015$, $p < 0.05$ | Reject H_o in favour of H_1 |
| No of children | $p = 0.357$, $p > 0.05$ | <i>Do not reject H_o</i> |
| Days worked | $p = 0.369$, $p > 0.05$ | <i>Do not reject H_o</i> |
| Hours worked | $p = 0.001$, $p < 0.05$ | Reject H_o in favour of H_1 |
| Lecture hours | $p = 0.001$, $p < 0.05$ | Reject H_o in favour of H_1 |

Sixty eight percent of total responses moderately (49 percent) or strongly (19 percent) disagreed to getting quality time for lecture planning (Table 4). 53 percent of male respondents moderately (40 percent) or strongly agreed (13 percent) to getting quality time for lecture planning. In comparison a very high (84 percent) of female respondents moderately (58 percent) or strongly

(26 percent) disagreed (Table 4). Female respondents expressed their views more candidly with only 5 percent opting for the neutral (neither agree nor disagree) response in comparison to 11 percent male opting for the neutral response. None of the female respondents reported strong agreement. Thus women reported to be more pressed for time in lecture planning.

Table 4: Response frequency details for question two

| | S. Agree | M. Agree | Neutral | M. Disagree | S. Disagree | n | n* |
|--|----------|----------|---------|-------------|-------------|---|----|
|--|----------|----------|---------|-------------|-------------|---|----|

| | | | | | | | |
|--------|--------|----------|---------|----------|----------|-----|---|
| Total | 2 (1%) | 31 (23%) | 11 (8%) | 67 (49%) | 26 (19%) | 137 | 4 |
| Male | 2 (3%) | 24 (33%) | 8 (11%) | 29 (40%) | 9 (13%) | 72 | 2 |
| Female | ----- | 7 (11%) | 3 (5%) | 38 (58%) | 17 (26%) | 65 | 2 |

n: total number of responses; n*: no response

Respondents with two or less than two years of work experience reported high degree of disagreement with the question (n=30, median=1.5) and rest respondents with more than two years of expatriate experience reported relatively lower moderate disagreement (n=101, median=2). Married respondents living with or without a spouse reported moderate disagreement (n= 129, median=2) and unmarried (all male) respondents reported moderate agreement (n=7, median=4). Respondents with homemaker wife reported moderate disagreement (n=14, median=2) whereas respondents with a working wife reported a collectively neutral view (n=51, median=3). A significant difference was observed in responses based on different working hours ($p=0.001$, $p<0.05$). While respondents working 40 to 52 hours reported moderate disagreement (n=111, median=2), in contrast respondents working less than 40 hours reported moderate agreement with the question (n=20, median=4). To analyse why respondents working lesser hours reported moderate agreement, following section first analyses the responses based on lecture hours and then presents the correlation

between working hours and lecture hours to find out the answer. Respondents working more than 21 hours reported highest degree of disagreement (n=13, median=1). Respondents working for 15-21 hours reported similar moderate disagreement (n=73, median=2) and respondents working less than 15 hours reported moderate agreement (n=44, median=4).

Spearman's rank correlation analysis (Table 5) of working hours and lecture hours reported significant correlation ($r = 0.488$, significant at 0.01, two tailed). This denotes that respondents who reported a higher number of weekly working hours also conducted higher number of lecture hours and the additional time respondents spent at workplace was primarily on account of conducting more lectures. This suggests the reason for respondents working lesser working hours reporting moderate agreement with the time available for lecture planning, whereas respondents working more hours reported moderate disagreement.

Table 5: Spearman's Rank correlation (working days/hours & lecture hours)

| | Days worked in a week | Hours worked in a week |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Hours worked in a week | 0.578* | ----- |
| Lecture hours in a week | 0.353* | 0.488* |

* Significance at 0.01 (two tailed)

As per above discussion following is the final status of demographic factors which significantly influenced responses to the question (Q 2) inquiring about getting quality time to plan in advance for lectures:

- The majority of the respondents disagreed with the statement that they got quality time to plan in advance for lectures.
- Disagreement was higher with female respondents.
- With the decreasing number of years of expatriate experience the degree of disagreement increased.
- Married respondents reported a higher degree of disagreement in comparison to that reported by single (unmarried) respondents.
- Married male respondents with homemaker wife reported a higher degree of disagreement when

compared to that of married male respondents with working wife.

- With increasing weekly working hours the degree of disagreement increased.
- With increasing weekly lecture hours the degree of disagreement increased.

Q3. You do not suffer from multitasking related work stress?

Except for gender, no other demographic factor significantly influenced the responses when respondents were inquired about multitasking related work stress (Q3). Details of the hypothesis test results are presented in the following table (Table 6).

Table 6: Significant difference in responses to question three

| Factor | Significance | Hypothesis Test Result |
|------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Gender | $p = 0.0027$, $p<0.05$ | Reject H_0 in favour of H_1 |
| Age | $p = 0.124$, $p>0.05$ | Do not reject H_0 |
| Expat experience | $p = 0.076$, $p>0.05$ | Do not reject H_0 |
| Marital Status | $p = 0.414$, $p>0.05$ | Do not reject H_0 |
| Working spouse | $p = 0.5852$, $p>0.05$ | Do not reject H_0 |
| No of children | $p = 0.593$, $p>0.05$ | Do not reject H_0 |
| Days worked | $p = 0.540$, $p>0.05$ | Do not reject H_0 |
| Hours worked | $p = 0.337$, $p>0.05$ | Do not reject H_0 |
| Lecture hours | $p = 0.337$, $p>0.05$ | Do not reject H_0 |

85 percent of the respondents moderately (61 percent) or strongly (24 percent) disagreed with not suffering from multitasking related work stress (Table 7). More than eight out of every ten respondents reported suffering from multitasking related work stress. Though majority of the respondents worked for five days a week (65 percent), and the majority of the respondents worked for 44 or lesser hours (55 percent), yet 85 percent reported suffering from multitasking related work stress. This indicates that even those respondents who are working lesser days and weekly hours are also influenced by multitasking and related stress.

78 percent of the male respondents reported moderate (66 percent) or strong (12 percent) disagreement with not suffering from multitasking related work stress. In comparison a very high percentage (91 percent) of female respondents moderately (55 percent) or strongly (36 percent) disagreed with the question. Once again women were more candid in their responses. Only three percent women respondents opted for the neutral option whereas 11 percent of the male respondents opted for the same.

Table 7: Response frequency details for question three

| | S. Agree | M. Agree | Neutral | M. Disagree | S. Disagree | n | N* |
|--------|----------|----------|---------|-------------|-------------|-----|-----|
| Total | 1 (1%) | 11 (8%) | 10 (7%) | 85 (61%) | 33 (24%) | 140 | 1 |
| Male | ----- | 8 (11%) | 8 (11%) | 49 (66%) | 9 (12%) | 74 | Nil |
| Female | 1 (2%) | 3 (5%) | 2 (3%) | 36 (55%) | 24 (36%) | 66 | 1 |

n: total number of responses; n*: no response

As per above discussion following is the final status of demographic factors which significantly influenced responses to the question (Q3) inquiring about multitasking related work stress:

- The majority of the respondents reported disagreement with the statement that they did not suffer from multitasking related work stress.

- Female respondents reported a higher degree of disagreement.
- For rest demographic factors the degree of disagreement was equally distributed.

4. Conclusion

Table 8: Compilation of tests for significant differences in responses on the basis of demographic factors

| | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 |
|------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Demography ▼ | Teach subject of expertise | Quality time for lecture preparation | Multitasking related work stress |
| Country | No ⁺ | No ⁺ | No ⁺ |
| Gender | Yes* | Yes* | Yes* |
| Age | Yes* | No ⁺ | No ⁺ |
| Expat experience | No ⁺ | Yes* | No ⁺ |
| Marital Status | Yes* | Yes* | No ⁺ |
| No of children | No ⁺ | No ⁺ | No ⁺ |
| Working spouse | No ⁺ | Yes* | No ⁺ |
| Days worked | No ⁺ | No ⁺ | No ⁺ |
| Hours worked | No ⁺ | No ⁺ | No ⁺ |
| Lecture hours | Yes* | Yes* | No ⁺ |

* *Reject Ho in favour of H₁*; ⁺ *Do not reject Ho*

Female respondents reported significantly higher degree of disagreement for all the three questions (Q1, Q2 and Q3). It is thus concluded that female expatriate higher education teachers suffer from relatively higher work related stress when compared to that of their male counterparts. Marital status and number of lecture hours conducted in a week were the two other important factors which influenced the responses. With the increasing number of lecture hours, the disagreement with subject choice (Q1) and lecture preparation time (Q2) also increased. Married respondents and respondents who were teaching higher number of teaching hours reported lack of lecture preparation time as well as lack of opportunities to teach subject of expertise and choice. But these two demographic segments did not report

occurrence of multitasking related stress thereby indicating that they were in a better position to handle the work related stress.

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